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ABSTRACT

This overview of nationwide bicentennial efforts with particular relevance for elementary and secondary educators deals with three apsects of the commemoration. First discussed is the programming that national organizations, such as the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, Project '87, The American Bar Association (ABA), and the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), are undertaking to commemorate the event. Next described are several national participatory school-based programs, including the "Young Scholars Bicentennial Project," sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH); "We the People," a mock trial program and student seminar sponsored by the ABA; a national writing competition for high school students on "The Constitution: How Does the Separation of Powers Make It Work?"; a national "History Day" on "Rights and Responsibilities in History"; and "The Jefferson Meeting on the Constitution: The Constitution in the Classroom." Lastly, examples are given of how schools can work with other educational groups to commemorate the Bicentennial; examples include the James Madison Fellowship Program and a National Bicentennial Competition. A list of 11 pertinent resources and addresses concludes the overview. (CC)

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COMMEMORATING THE BICENTENNIAL OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION
ERIC DIGEST NO. 31

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COMMEMORATING THE BICENTENNIAL OF THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

by Lynn Parisi

The official bicentennial of the Constitution takes place on September 17, 1987. This event not only provides an occasion for celebrating an historical landmark, it offers the opportunity to examine, in a meaningful way, the underlying values, evolution, and contemporary significance of this fundamental document.

A wide variety of local, state, and national projects to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the oldest working constitution are well underway, and will continue through 1991, the anniversary of the adoption of the Bill of Rights. This ERIC Digest provides an overview of nationwide bicentennial efforts with particular relevance to elementary and secondary educators: national organizations, school-focused programs, and school-community collaboratives.

What national organizations are undertaking programs to commemorate the Bicentennial of the Constitution?

A number of publicly and privately sponsored projects have been initiated to observe the 200th anniversary of the Constitution. Common to these projects is an emphasis on recognizing the bicentennial through substantive educational programs rather than simple celebration, and efforts to present both school and community offerings, often in a complementary or integrated fashion.

The Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. Civic efforts are epitomized in the Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, named by President Reagan in 1985. The commission has proposed that the nation observe the bicentennial in three phases commemorating the historical development and execution of the document: Phase I, 1985-1987, the framing and signing of the Constitution; Phase II, 1988, the ratification of the Constitution by the states; and Phase III, 1989, the establishment of government under the Constitution. Among the projects to be undertaken or encouraged by the Commission are the publication of a commemorative calendar, publication and distribution of a newsletter, and development and distribution of a community-focused bicentennial planning book. The Commission is also sponsoring a number of school-focused programs in cooperation with other bicentennial organizations.

Project '87. Sponsored jointly by the American Historical Association and the American Political Science Association, Project '87 is a multi-faceted program designed to enhance awareness and discussion of the Constitution. The project has two stages of particular interest to educators. One stage promotes discussion of contemporary constitutional issues through community programs. The other involves curriculum materials development and programs to improve teaching about the Constitution in schools and colleges.

As part of its educational activities, Project '87 sponsored the development of *Lessons on the Constitution* (John J. Patrick and Richard Remy) which includes 60 activities to enhance secondary textbook coverage of key constitutional issues and themes. The project's quarterly journal, *This Constitution*, chronicles events and programs in honor of the bicentennial and is available free to schools and organizations planning bicentennial observances.

Project '87 is also working with the Agency for Instructional Technology to develop a set of six half-hour video programs on the Constitution for secondary classes. Scheduled for distribution in fall 1987, this package of videos, teaching guide, and student materials will cover the themes of government under the rule of law, separation of powers and checks and balances, freedom of speech, equality under law, and federalism.

The American Bar Association. "We The People" is a bicentennial education program undertaken by the American Bar Association's Commission on Public Understanding About the Law and Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship. In this effort, public offerings such as the development of a television and radio series analyzing contemporary constitutional questions are complemented by an extensive elementary-secondary education program. Entitled the "Youth Initiative" of We the People, the school program sponsors several national student contests and has published elementary and secondary bicentennial activities handbooks. Designed to provide both in-school and out-of-school activities, these publications contain guidelines for conducting mock trials, role plays, simulated legislative hearings and political campaigns, and community service activities, as well as strategies for enlisting the contributions of key community and resource people. The handbooks are available free to educational organizations involved in the bicentennial.

We the People's bicentennial newsletter, *Salute to the Constitution*, contains regular updates on bicentennial activities across the country, as well as reviews of bicentennial resources and curricula. Published three times a year through 1987, it is free to schools, education agencies, and other groups involved in bicentennial commemorative activities.

National Council for the Social Studies. A number of programs to encourage classroom teaching about the Constitution during the bicentennial period have been planned by the national professional organization for social studies educators. In September 1987, a special issue of *Social Education*, the organization's journal, will focus on teaching about the Constitution, as will a continuing *Social Education* column, "Document of the Month," and an NCSS bulletin. Working with its Ad Hoc Committee on the Bicentennial, NCSS has planned teacher workshops on the Constitution at its annual meetings.

What participatory school-based programs are available nationwide?

Educators interested in involving their districts, schools, or individual classrooms or students in national projects have a number of excellent choices.

As part of its Special Initiative for the Bicentennial of the Constitution, the National Endowment for the Humanities is sponsoring a "Young Scholars Bicentennial Project" for high school and college level students. In 1987, as it has in 1986, NEH will offer awards of $1800 (high school level) and $2200 (college level), plus a $400 honorarium for faculty advisor, for scholarly student research and writing on some aspect of the Constitution.

The ABA program "We The People" offers a number of school-based programs. A national mock trial program and student seminar on the Constitution will be held in Washington, DC in 1987. This program will build upon existing mock trial programs around the country by inviting each state to send a team to a national playoff.

The ABA has also joined with the Commission on the Bicentennial and *U.S.A. Today* to conduct the National Bicentennial Writing Competition for High School Students. The competition, to be held during the 1986-87 school year, will solicit student essays on the theme "The Constitution: How Does the Separation of Powers Make it Work?" The competition carries cash prizes at the national and state territory level.

"History Day" is a nationwide program in which students in grades 6-12 research and present papers, visual projects, or performances on an annual theme. Conducted each spring in 45 states, History Day involves successive local, regional, state, and national competitions. The History Day theme chosen for 1987 is "Rights and Responsibilities in History," a topic designed to encourage students to investigate constitutional issues.

The Jefferson Meeting on the Constitution: The Constitution in the Classroom is a program of materials developed by the Jefferson Foundation, a non-profit, non-advocacy educational organization. The set enables social studies classes to simulate what a constitutional convention would be like if delegates convened to consider the adequacy of the Constitution for contemporary society. Materials include a detailed teacher's guide and student discussion guides for six proposals for constitutional change: legislative veto power, the presidential term and executive power, amendment by convention, judicial accountability, congressional term of office, and electoral college reform. A similar set of materials is available for conducting a Jefferson meeting with community groups.

How can schools work with other educational groups to commemorate the bicentennial?

A goal of many of the organizations sponsoring national bicentennial activities is encouragement of education-community collaboratives.

Project '87 has initiated two programs designed to maximize interaction and cooperation among classroom and community-based programs. The James Madison Fellowship Program brings secondary teachers of U.S. history, civics, and government together with noted constitutional scholars. Teachers participate in three weeks of substantive lecture, curriculum materials review, and workshops to develop skills and strategies for sharing their knowledge with others. Upon completion of the seminar, these teachers return home to act as local resource people, planning and conducting school and community programs. Twenty teachers are participating in a pilot of the program, held in the summer of 1986 at the Social Studies Development Center of Indiana University. The James Madison program will be expanded in 1987.

As another link between school and public programs, Project '87 is developing a poster panel exhibit on the history and fundamental principles of the Constitution. Upon completion, the exhibit will be distributed to schools, libraries, museums, and community centers.

A National Bicentennial Competition is being sponsored by the Center for Civic Education from 1987 through 1991. The program is designed not only to commemorate the bicentennial and enhance classroom coverage of the Constitution, but also to involve teachers and students, congressmen, and other members of the business and government community in a common bicentennial project. Each year, the competition will involve classes in one or more school systems in each of the nation's congressional districts. Participating classes at the elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels will complete a six-week instructional program with materials prepared by the Center for Civic Education. Classes then compete as teams in the bicentennial competition held successively at local, intermediate, and state levels. At the end of the year, a national competition will be conducted in Washington, DC for winning teams from the state competitions. Teachers will be trained for the program through state and local workshops. Congressmen, local and state business representatives, and government leaders will participate in the project as sponsors and judges.

RESOURCES

Following is a list of relevant resource organizations and publications. Those entries followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and available in microfiche and or paper copy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For price information write EDRS, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandra, VA 22304.

Center For Civic Education. Law in a Free Society Project. Suite 1, 5115 Douglas Fir Rd., Calabasas, CA 91302.

Commission on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. 735 Jackson Place NW, Washington, DC 20503.

First Report of the Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985.

The Jefferson Meeting on the Constitution: The Constitution in the Classroom. Washington, DC: The Jefferson Foundation, 1985.

National Council for the Social Studies. 3501 Newark Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20016.

National Endowment for the Humanities. 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20506.

National History Day. 11201 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 4106.

Patrick, John J. and Richard C. Remy. **Lessons on the Constitution: Supplements to High School Courses in American History, Government, and Civics.** Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium, Inc. and Project '87, 1984. ED 258 891.

Project '87. 1527 New Hampshire NW, Washington, DC 20036.

This Constitution: A Bicentennial Chronicle. Washington, DC: Project '87, 1984. ED 243 761.

We the People. American Bar Association. 750 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60611.

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